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硕士学位论文

A Tentative Study of Blog's Facilitating Role in English Writing Teaching to English Majors

关于博客技术能否促进英语专业写作教学的研究

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Synopsis

As a newly developed online technology, Blog has recently been widely used in various fields, in media, education, entertainments, sports, etc. Its popularity has promoted the exploration of blog's educational function and application. This paper aims at exploring the feasibilities of utilizing blog as an instructional tool in teaching English writing and the practical ways of using blog to promote the students' learning interest. For pedagogical interest, it also proposes a tentative design for blog-based English writing teaching.

For this purpose, the present paper first looks at the situations in which writing is taught to English majors in China to illustrate that the traditional method is not effective enough. The paper then discusses the different views on the nature of writing, focusing on two main approaches to teaching writing—the product approach and the process approach, with a tentative conclusion that the process approach is the ideal teaching approach in blog-based teaching. Next, the present paper elaborates on the feasibility of blog's application in teaching English writing by building a theoretical foundation on the basis of five language learning theories, namely the constructivist learning theory, the humanistic learning theory, Krashen's language acquisition theory, the collaborative learning theory and the reflective learning theory. With such theoretical explorations, the present writer then produces a tentative design of blog-based teaching procedure to demonstrate that the communicative nature and the simultaneity in the characteristics of blog can provide abundant online materials, offer an efficient way of writing, ensure an effective interaction between the teacher and the students and provide the students opportunities of learning from each other. In the last chapter, the present writer conducts an investigation, consisting of a questionnaire and an interview, to provide some empirical support for the assumption that blog can play a facilitating role in teaching English writing.

Key words: blog; teaching English writing; process approach

摘 要

博客作为一种新兴的网络技术,广泛应用于多种行业和领域,包括新闻界,教育界,娱乐界等等。它的大众性和受欢迎的程度也导致了大量的对博客的教育应用的探索。本文旨在探讨博客作为一种教育工具可运用于英语写作教学的可行性,并探索如何在博客的协助下激发学生对英语写作学习的动力和参与度。此外,本文还尝试性地提出了一项以博客为基础的英语写作教学流程设计。

为了达到此研究目的,本文首先探讨中国英语专业写作教学的现状,由此指出传统的英语写作教学方法已经不能满足教师和学生的教与学的需要,无法有效地提高学生的写作能力和学习兴趣。论文继而阐述了对写作本质的几种不同看法,博客技术的兴起与发展,两种主要的写作教学法——成果教学法和过程教学法,并得出初步结论:认为过程教学法适合于以博客为基础的写作教学,因为两者都侧重语言教学的交际性。论文进而探讨了五种学习策略和学习理论,即协作学习理论,人文主义学习理论,语言习得理论,建构主义学习理论和反思性学习理论,尝试性地提出了一个以博客为基础的英语写作教学流程,论证了博客的交际性和即时性能够为学习者提供丰富的在线写作资源和高效的写作方式,使老师和同学之间能够进行快捷有效的互动和互评,并为学习者提供了从同伴作品中吸取优点,反思问题的机会。为了增强本研究的说服力,提供除理论以外的实证支持,论文最后进行了一项包括调查问卷和面谈两个内容的实证调查。调查结果充分表明,博客可以而且应该运用于英语写作教学当中来,以充分发挥和提高学生的学习兴趣,优化学习环境,丰富学习内容,为学生提供自主学习的有效空间。

关键词: 博客; 英语写作教学; 过程法

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Introduction

Research background

In recent years, with the enthusiasm of learning English growing vigorously, English writing and teaching has caught more and more attention. A large number of experts and English teachers have been making efforts in finding out problems and experimenting on new teaching methods. Their accomplishments have brought to our attention problems in teaching writing and the urgency of adopting effective teaching strategies. Writing can objectively reflect the students' abilities of logical thinking and linguistic expression. It can, on the one hand, enhance what students have already learnt; on the other hand, writing can develop their linguistic skills to a higher level. However, writing has been regarded as the most difficult and weakest for both teaching and learning. Many learners find writing difficult either because they have no idea to write about or they do not know how to express their thoughts. Teachers also find the teaching of writing difficult either because they lack adequate teaching resources or do not have enough skills for instruction and marking. There are other problems not to be easily solved, such as, outdated textbooks, rigid teaching manners, indefinite teaching goals, teacher-dominant classrooms, etc. How to teach English writing effectively? How to motivate students' interest in learning to write in English? By what means can writing be taught and learnt with noticeable accomplishments? These are issues that have long been constantly discussed, argued about and thought of in the field of English teaching.

For quite a long time, due to the powerful influence from such linguists as Sausure and Chomsky, most linguistic research has focused mostly on the language itself, whereas linguistic pragmatics, culture and social costumes have been neglected. However, more and more teachers of foreign languages have recognized that communicative competence is the goal of their teaching and that teachers should "engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes" (Brown, 1994:245). Real needs and authentic use of the target language contribute greatly to the success of language learning (Nunan, 1989).

According to the research conducted by Wang Fufang and Liu Xianfeng (2003/4:54-57), the English majors in China have the following key problems in writing, which were revealed in their Test for English Majors(Band 8).

- (1) Lack of creativity in points of view and contents.
- (2) Lack of expressive power.
- (3) Incapability in selecting appropriate words and expressions.
- (4) Lack of fluency in sentence organization.
- (5) Non-standard calligraphy; unscientific assumptions or perspectives and poor cohesion.

Several factors may contribute to the current situation in which English writing is taught. These include: lack of effective textbooks, inappropriate teaching methods, and students' attitude toward English writing.

(1) Lack of effective textbooks

The deficiencies of most writing tasks in traditional English textbooks are summarized by Wang (2000:140) in his teaching course book as follows:

- They are mainly accuracy-based.
- They are designed to practice certain target structures.
- There is insufficient preparation before the writing stage.
- There is no sense of audience.
- There is no sense of authenticity.
- Students are given ideas to express rather than being invited to invent their own.
- There is no opportunity for creative writing, particularly for expressing unusual or original ideas.

Due to these deficiencies, students often consider the writing course as their least favorite. It appears that a crucial measurement to improve the teaching of writing in China is to produce effective textbooks, which include meaningful and realistic writing tasks that relate practice to specific purposes instead of asking students to write simply for the sake of writing.

(2) Inappropriate teaching methods

For a long time, the product approach based on behaviorist psychology has dominated the English writing class. Behaviorist psychology believes that the process

of learning consists in building connections between stimuli and responses, and that writing is such a connection. The product approach stresses linguistic knowledge, particularly the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax and cohesive devices (Pincas, 1982). With this approach, teaching writing generally consists of four stages: familiarization of the model composition, controlled writing, guided writing and free writing. The students write on a given topic in a restricted time and hand in the composition for the teacher to “correct”—which usually means to find the errors. The whole writing process is completed under the absolute control of the teacher and the students have no freedom for creativity. When correcting the students’ compositions, the teacher often pays special attention to the grammatical mistakes while neglecting the students’ imagination and their way of organizing ideas. Therefore, the students’ writing ability can hardly be improved.

The product approach neglects the students’ active role of coordinating, communicating and monitoring. It puts the student in a very passive place, while the teacher is given dominant position in the classroom. Corder (1990) criticizes this kind of practice, saying that the trouble typically is that we always talk about teaching. It should be noted that it is the learners who are learning a language, not the teachers.

(3) Students’ attitude toward English writing

Writing is a complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate his control over a number of variables simultaneously, so it is a lengthy process which can not be achieved over night. Since the current society and job market attach great importance to graduates’ speaking and listening abilities, college students have paid much more attention to their oral and listening skills than writing. They may be worried about inadequate oral competence or listening, but few of them consider writing as a skill that should be improved urgently. Often, students apply mechanically formulaary sentence patterns and so-called model frameworks to their own writings; therefore, their compositions are most probably dull in idea and expression.

The inadequacies presented above in teaching writing in China have prompted the present writer to conduct the current research.

Purpose of the study

This thesis aims at discovering the possibilities of utilizing multimedia and network

technologies, specifically blog, in the teaching of English writing and the ways to promote the efficiency of English writing with the assistance of multimedia and network technologies.

For the past several decades, the development of multimedia and network technologies has greatly promoted the research of educational technology, especially in foreign language teaching. Compared with other disciplines, the language teaching field has adopted multimedia and network technologies most widely and multimedia and network technologies have become an effective way to assist the training of basic linguistic skills.

Motivated by the incomparable advantages of multimedia and network technologies over traditional teaching, many experts and teachers have been making efforts to develop new models of teaching English writing based on multimedia and network technologies and have made considerable achievements.

New technologies can optimize the teaching environment and teaching resources for writing instruction. Thanks to multimedia and network technologies, at present we have convenient learning tools on the Internet, such as various kinds of on-line dictionaries which are quick and handy for students to look up words or expressions. Furthermore, we have easy access to rich resources and references for writing, so students will not feel "speechless" because of the lack of life experiences. The Internet is of remarkable help for students to collect information before the writing process begins. An enormous number of websites and BBS for English writing teaching and learning have sprung up rapidly for the recent years. For example, <http://www.englishchina.com>, <http://www.4ewriting.com> and <http://www.calm-sea.com/index.htm>. The construction of English learning data-base, which is a large body of information and data intended to be used for a specific purpose has showed people its power and effectiveness in assisting the teaching of English writing.

Since multimedia and network technologies have many advantages in assisting language teaching, it is worthwhile to find out how they can be we applied effectively to the teaching of English writing and this is exactly what the present writer will endeavor to do.

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